

****ATTENTION****

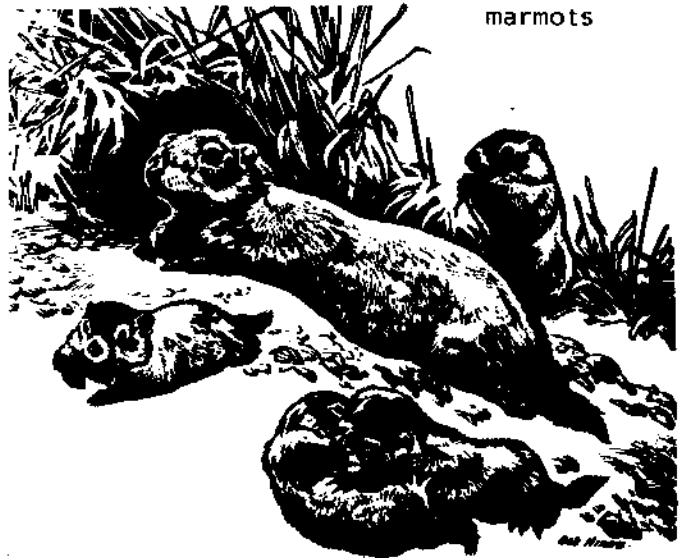
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Habitat management for

MARMOTS

In the State of Washington



Two types of marmots, the yellow-bellied *Marmota flaviventris* and the hoary *M. caligata* and *M. olympus* are widely distributed in Washington. In addition, the eastern woodchuck, *M. monax*, reaches the extreme northeastern corner of the state in the Pend Oreille Mountains.

The yellow-bellied marmot, well known anywhere in the state east of the Cascades, is commonly called "ground hog" or "rock chuck." The latter name is more descriptive, since the animal is rarely found away from rocks. Basalt talus slopes are favorites, but any pile of boulders, natural or man-made, seems to fulfill the requirement.

The two species of hoary marmot are very much alike, but one is found in the high Cascades the other in the Olympic Mountains. They are commonly called "whistler" because of their piercing call, which may be heard a mile away. Whistlers are much larger than rock chucks, sometimes weighing as much as 20 pounds.

Marmots are active less than half of their lives, since their combined aestivation-hibernation periods occupy 7-9 months each year. Emerging when the snow melts in spring or slightly before, they voraciously gobble whatever grasses or succulent plants are available. The rock chuck retires again in July or August, when green food and water become scarce; the whistler remains active until September.

Mating takes place shortly after the animals come out of hibernation, and usually 4 or 5 young are born. The young are sexually mature at 2 years of age.

Most of the larger predators--coyotes, bobcats, cougars, eagles--enjoy a marmot meal when they can get it. Hawks and the smaller carnivores prey on the young. Both types of marmots protect themselves by living in communities in rocky places with plenty of avenues of escape in the crevices. Lookouts are posted on high boulders or even on the roofs of old buildings, and their shrill warning whistle serves to alert the colony in time of danger.

VALUES

The hoary marmot, living in rough mountain country, ordinarily has little contact with humans. Because of its esthetic value, it has enjoyed complete protection from hunting in Washington for many years.

The rock chuck has a special fondness for alfalfa, and where irrigated valleys are bordered by talus slopes harboring colonies of the animals, trouble results. Coupling their large size with healthy appetites, the chucks can do a great deal of damage.

Hunting ground hogs with high-powered "varmint" rifles has always been a popular spring sport in Eastern Washington. They have recently been reclassified as game animals and an early closed season protects them until the young are able to forage for themselves.

Although the meat of marmots is said to be delicious, it is seldom eaten. Some Indian tribes prize it highly. Properly prepared, it should be as good as squirrel or rabbit.